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ABSTRACT

Materials were gathered in a first and second grade informal, family-grouped classroom over 45 days of two school years to provide an interpretive framework for looking at writing in context. Participant observation was used in order to see the classroom community from a member's perspective while at the same time making explicit those features usually taken for granted. Notes, photographs, audiotaped segments of classroom life, interviews of the teacher and of children, photocopied children's writing, and weekly newsletters to parents were analyzed, revealing a number of facts about the relationship between writing and the classroom environment. Observations suggested that children cared about doing things with friends and that the teacher fostered this interest by linking people, ideas, and things in classroom assignments. This practice indicated that children and their teacher were engaged in creating their own culture. By shaping contexts, the teacher encouraged students to experiment with varied written language uses and supported the gradual development of new modes of writing by embedding them in otherwise familiar events. What the class did together in exploring their world through literature and through direct experience gave support and significance to their early ventures in writing. (HOD)

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The Context for Writing:

A Descriptive Study of One Family-Grouped, Informal First and Second Grade Classroom

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Children's early school writing can be viewed as bits of text which derive their meaning from the matrix of shared background and joint, concrete activity in which they are embedded. This early writing may be fragmentary and implicit, yet meaningful within a network of familiar people, things, and events.

What is the nature of this network or matrix in which children's early writing is embedded, and from which it gradually emerges? Children's developing ability to construct text is increasingly understood, but what of the context which surrounds and supports these texts? How does the context change with this development? How might these relationships be described?

To explore these questions, one small classroom community was chosen for detailed observation. The goal was to describe this community without distorting its dynamic, complex nature, to show its people, things, and events, not as lists, but in their relationships to one another. The views of its participants were also of interest. What was of importance to them in their community? Where did they see writing in the whole? Ultimately, the question concerned meaning: what meanings were developed through the shaping of this particular context, how were these meanings represented, and what was the role of writing in developing and representing them?

Materials were gathered in this first and second grade informal, family-grouped classroom over 45 days of two school years. Out of this experience, generalizations were made which became part of an interpretive framework for looking at writing in context.

Thus the framework was based in observations of daily classroom life. However, it was also a product of the observer's theoretical orientation which guided selection and interpretation of materials.

Research Background

Several strands contributed to this theoretical orientation. These will be briefly discussed in terms of their contribution to the lens of the observer.

Learning and language learning Learning to speak, like all learning, was now understood to be the outcome of children's own active processing of experience, as both forms and functions were inferred, tested, and revised (Brown, 1973; Halliday, 1975). Children were also observed to construct their own systems of written language, moving from a global awareness of the functions of print to a progressively refined control of print features (Clay, 1975; Harste, et al., 1982). They practiced principles of English writing conventions (Clay, ibid.,) and invented ways to spell English words (Read, 1975).

The writing process There was also a greater appreciation of the complexities of the writing process itself, as a result of theoretical (Britton, et al., 1975; Moffett, 1968; Vygotsky, 1934, 1962) and observational studies (Emig, 1971; Graves, 1973; Clay, 1975, Ferreiro, 1980). Vygotsky's conception of inner speech as a bridge between thought and fully elaborated language has been a powerful metaphor. Moffett (1979) has noted the many simultaneous activities involved in writing, from revision of inner speech, the most difficult, to making marks on paper. Writing was now considered an integrated, higher level cognitive process rather than a collection of subskills, to be learned separately and later assembled for use (Britton et al., 1975; Downing, 1981; Emig, 1971), or merely a mechanical, motor process.

Writing, though related to spoken language, was now also viewed as a system in its own right, with its own demands on the writer. It was recognized that writers were deprived of the text-building resources available to speakers -

gesture, facial expression, intonation, present shared context and past shared experience (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982). Young children come to school experienced in the use of conversational resources, and gradually learn to construct and sustain "solo discourse" (Moffett, 1968). With experience, they show a consideration for the audience's need for explicitness, and their texts become understandable even when background is not shared with a reader (King & Rentel, 1981).

Context-dependence of writing Construction of written texts by children was seen as dependent upon the nature of the context within which texts functioned. In the case of spoken language, familiar routines with trusted people enabled babies to interpret speech and to express contextually relevant meanings with invented but systematic sounds (Bruner, 1975; Halliday, 1975). Just so, familiar situations gave meaning to writing, as children saw messages function in context, and as they practiced their own message-making, often with invented forms (Harste et al., 1982). The impetus to write came from the context - from the network of social relationships and activities which gave rise to the meanings of the child's message.

Recent research in classroom writing does look at its function in context. Florio (1978) and Florio & Clark (1982) described varied communicative functions which were brought about by the teacher's contextual shaping. In contrast, Britton et al., (1975) emphasized the value of language to the user in shaping experience and making it available for self and others. From this work comes an interest in language to learn as well as to communicate, and in ways in which contexts can be structured to bring this about.

The adult role Adults not only shape the context within which children construct their own language systems, they also interact within it. Theories

of Vygotsky (1978) suggested that support for individual, cognitive learning came from culturally developed tools, especially language, as used by adults within children's "zone of proximal development". That is, adults collaborated with children in constructing text which represented children's own meanings. Sharing these meanings, adults were able to scaffold children's representation (Ratner & Bruner, 1977). This relationship, documented in studies of spoken language development (Cazden, 1979; Halliday, 1975; Shugar, 1978; Snow, 1977; Wells & Nicholls, in press) was of interest to pursue in observing the context for writing. What did teachers do to scaffold early writing? How did they create shared meaning through experience? How did they encourage new language use by their response? If context was important, the adult role in creating it, and interacting within it, was of key importance.

Context in linguistics The importance of context as indicated both by child language research studies and by studies of the process and development of writing was also evident in developments within the field of linguistics. Systems of language were now extended beyond syntactic, semantic, and phonological to new levels of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, thus linking and subordinating language to the culture from which its meanings derived (Hymes, 1972; Halliday, 1974). Interest moved from sentences to extended discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), from referential to intended (conveyed) and situated meaning (Cook-Gumperz, 1977), from a verbal to a multimodal understanding of communication (Cook-Gumperz, ibid.). Context outside of the formal language system was acknowledged to generate its meanings and to affect its use.

The concept of register (Halliday, McIntosh, & Strevens, 1964) was used to describe the sensitivity of language to context - to particular activities (field), to role relationships (tenor), and to communicative channels (mode)

which characterized these various contexts of use. These dimensions of field, tenor, and mode of discourse were said to predict the linguistic register of language used, as people intuitively shifted their degrees of formality and explicitness (for example) to suit the situation.

In this study, field, tenor, and mode were used to order observations of activities, interpersonal relationships, and varied available means of communication and representation. These distinctions echo the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions carried by the grammar of text (Halliday, 1975), and the relationship between the I, thou, and it of Moffett's triangle of discourse (1968).

Cutting across the dimensions of field, tenor, and mode was a contrast between what was familiar and what was new (Bernstein, 1971; Hymes, 1972; Rosen & Rosen, 1973). Each dimension was characterized by aspects which were familiar and homelike, and by those which were novel, more abstract and complex, representing the wider world of school and society. For example, the field, tenor, and mode which constituted the context for early, fragmentary writing should be found to be homelike in contrast to the context which called for fully elaborated language, written for a specialized purpose and a distant audience.

A further distinction between clarity and approximation was derived from theories of learning and language learning. It became part of the final framework, along with these contrasts between familiarity and novelty, and field, tenor, and mode of discourse. It was used to characterize the teacher's provision of clear models within the context, and the children's freedom and responsibility to create their own representations, approximate as they may have been (Smith, 1981).

Written language in theory should be related in some systematic way to these contextual characteristics of field, tenor, and mode, or "the relevant environment of the text" (Halliday, 1975), characterized by its own semiotic structures and set of meanings. Children's writing should reflect the particular events in which they were embedded, the distinctive "contexts of situation" (Malinowski, 1923) as described by familiar and new aspects of field, tenor, and mode.

To return to the questions asked at the outset: what was the nature of the community as observed and as understood by its participants? What was of importance to them? And what place did writing have in the whole? The frameworks of field, tenor, and mode, and the contrast between familiarity and novelty will now be used to describe this community.

The Study

Because the intention was to observe writing in context, undisturbed, a naturalistic methodology was chosen. Participant-observation was used in order to see the classroom community from a member's perspective while at the same time making explicit those features usually taken for granted. Guided by an initial "foreshadowed notion" of what was of interest (Malinowski in Wolcott, 1975), the process of articulating the problem continued through the study, resulting finally in a descriptive framework. So too the collection of materials overlapped with analysis, as inductive observation interacted with pre-study theoretical biases. In this way, themes or categories for organizing materials were "caught" (Overholt & Stallings, 1976) and were modified with further observation and analysis.

Notes, photographs, audiotaped segments of classroom life, interviews of the teacher and of children, photocopied children's writing, and weekly newsletters to parents constituted the materials to be analyzed. Notes and

transcripts were duplicated, cut apart, and placed in one or more of 62 categories. While the relationships between them underwent change, these initial categories continued to be used throughout. Without attempting to account for or report on every piece of data, the effort was made to fill every part of the framework with examples, thus testing the framework itself. Finally, even as the report was written, the analysis continued until children's texts and their contexts were related in a systematic and abstract way.

The process of description will now be recapitulated, beginning with the initial inductive search for patterns of space, materials, and time in a new classroom environment. It will continue with the analysis of the field, tenor, and mode of the context, and of writing events within it (as "contexts of situation"). Next, three writing events will be examined as they developed over time, particularly for the familiar contextual aspects which supported new aspects of this writing mode. Finally, an abstract representation will be proposed to summarize text-context relationships.

Space, Materials, and Time

To discover patterns in the use of space, materials, and time, observations were made from the "ground up", setting aside familiarity with schools as much as possible. A detailed description was made of these patterns, and implications drawn for the kind of classroom life they enabled and encouraged.

The following use of space and materials characterized this classroom. A visitor looking in would have the impression of an intensively used classroom space divided into small, more or less specialized areas, created by the placement of conventional and improvised, often domestic furnishings. Plants, several kinds of animals, and children's displayed work were prominent. Materials were accessible and organized clearly for easy use by children.

If the visitor came back again and again, the following use of time would become evident. Certain recurring events would become familiar, in spite of their variation in position during the day and week, in length, and in content. These were marked by clusters of significant features; children's position, location, and bodily orientation, their roles, their activity patterns, and their language would be seen to vary with the event. For example, rugtime, when the teacher and children met on the rug for various purposes, had a different look than the worktime event which followed.

Within the two major events of rugtime and worktime were these repeated occasions for reading and writing: reading conferences, newsletter planning and writing, writing evaluations, writing thought ramblings, and observing and writing observations. These constituted different "contexts of situation" for writing and reading, and had their own characteristics. Children were more sedentary, less mobile in reading conferences than during worktime, and the teacher's role more predictable and specialized, as she met children in these conferences while others read alone or with friends. Newsletter planning and writing merged into worktime, as children wrote articles alone or collaboratively, with the support of an outline made by the teacher and children as they remembered the week's events together. This outline became one distinctive and concrete feature of the newsletter event. It contrasted to features of other events such as observation writing where there were concrete, often living objects present, along with charts, word lists, labels, and records of past experiments and experiences in various interest centers. The thought rambling event differed from each of these in that there was no present verbal or material support. Instead, thought ramblings were written about recent but past shared experiences, and depended on the strength of this experience in memory and imagination.

Next, implications of this use of space, materials, and time were considered. What were the consequences of dividing space into small, specialized areas, provisioned with accessible, concrete, and often changing, growing materials, and domestic as well as institutional furnishings? What were the consequences of shaping time into clearly structured, distinctive, and long events? Four themes, formulated to answer these questions, are summarized here. They emphasized familiar, homelike characteristics which allowed children to learn actively and independently.

1. A family-like way of living was encouraged by the use of small but specialized areas, domestic as well as institutional furnishings, accessible materials, and large time segments. Within this framework children could regulate their own use of space, materials, and time, including whether to interact with others.

2. Provisions of concrete, dynamic, and accessible materials, and provision of large amounts of time allowed and promoted an experience-based curriculum. Direct sensory experiences could be processed, socially and individually, through talking and reflecting, and could be represented in varied, personal ways.

3. Clear, understandable organization of these resources of space, materials, and time, enabled children to participate in activities independently. Areas of the room and events of the day and week, though varied in detail, were distinct and familiar enough so that children could act appropriately and independently.

4. Flexibility characterized the actual use of space, materials, and time. Clearly-organized space and materials were also adaptable in nature, and were used flexibly. Clearly-organized events were varied in position, duration, content and form, and were separated by flexible transitions. This

flexibility and variation did not, however, disrupt the overall clarity of order.

Field, Tenor, and Mode of Discourse

The analysis of this classroom context then moved from an "etic" or surface description of the teacher's use of the resources of space, materials, and time, to an "emic" interpretation of the underlying relationships and meanings which characterized this community (Pike, 1954). These relationships were analyzed as field, tenor, and mode of discourse. In this study, field meant the ways in which children experienced content or subject matter, tenor took in the general shaping of interpersonal relationships, and mode was extended to include non-linguistic as well as linguistic communication and representational means. These three dimensions were assumed to be interdependent, affecting each other, a concrete field, for instance, supplying needed context for a verbally implicit mode.

Thus, it was through these interdependencies that familiarity in some aspects was balanced by novelty in others. This same use of the familiar to support the new is found in the idea of linking home and school (Bernstein, 1971; Donaldson, 1978; Rosen & Rosen, 1973). It also is inherent in the idea of scaffolding, that is, helping children to develop and represent meaning in new ways. Adults who supported or scaffolded their efforts, provided forms which expressed shared meanings, and gradually changed the scaffold so that children developed new linguistic meanings and means (Bruner, 1977; Cazden, 1979; Wells, 1979).

In this way, adults entered into the cognitive and linguistic development of children. They could be said to represent social knowledge which was essential to individual, psychological development. In this study, adults were considered to be not only creators of classroom contexts, but also

elements within it, particularly as they interacted with children to scaffold their learning, in this case, of language and writing (Vygotsky, 1978).

Field of discourse Familiar and new aspects of field of discourse can be contrasted, even though they existed on a continuum. Four aspects are discussed:

1. Here and now content was typical. It was also stretched to more removed times and places. While some content was always concretely present - butterflies, rocks, magnets - other was removed from the present. When more removed, then the teacher maintained connections with the familiar in some other dimension (tenor or mode) or through some aspect of field. For example, she read and told the story of Ben Franklin and the kite, mitigating the abstractness of this verbal activity concerning another time and place, and abstract concepts about electricity by referring to children's recent shared, concrete experience with batteries, wires, and bulbs. She thus linked new content to old (field). She also incorporated her own and the children's relationships and feelings, about lightning, for example, even though not essential to the content (tenor), and allowed informal language within a more formal presentation of material (mode).

2. Redundancy, repetition, and interrelatedness of topics, ideas, themes, and studies were also typical, although each event was slightly novel and unpredictable. Many identical or similar experiences were available over the two years children spent with the teacher, presumably giving them many chances to abstract generalizations common to all. Not only was content redundant, so also were ways of studying it predictable. A survey of newsletters written for parents over two years documents this redundancy in themes and experiences. Children grew to know that theme studies involved certain standard approaches - the collaborative creation of a display of theme-related

objects, for instance. In addition, successive themes seemed to be related to each other, contributing to an overarching but unarticulated major theme, for example, birth and growth, as developed by many related experiences: the birth of baby rats, the hatching of chicks, the visit of a baby brother. These experiences gave children opportunities to compare, contrast, and generalize, albeit implicitly. Redundancy was also found within theme studies, as children had many different experiences from which they could generalize. From multiple encounters with stories, films, and words about islands, for instance, children had several opportunities to extract invarient features and develop concepts of "islandness".

Within this repetition and redundancy, however, there was variation. One year's program and group was not exactly like another's. Successive themes within the year were different as well as similar; changes in the room were evidence of this. The particular personal and social meanings growing out of each repeated experience were unique and unpredictable, even though supported by a redundancy in content and process.

Not only were theme experiences historically unique, but their inherent nature was often dynamic, changing, and so suspenseful and unpredictable. Experiences with natural sciences were obvious examples; so also were experiences with literature. The teacher's verbal interaction was often playful, as she enjoyed creating suspense and encouraging prediction and discovery.

3. Integration of content across disciplinary lines was typical, although there was a gradual recognition of more formal categories of knowledge. Children encountered the content of these themes in an integrated fashion; concrete, sensory experiences involved integrated use of symbolic processes and ideas from several disciplines. For example, experiences with time called for the use of reading, writing, estimation, measurement, counting, and for

content from social studies, science, and history, as balls were bounced and timed, real clocks examined, decorative clocks made, shadows measured, daily schedules recorded, and family history time lines made. At the same time, trends toward a new, more formal approach could be seen in the signs hanging over areas denoting domains of art, writing, reading, science, and in the lessons on math, spelling, and handwriting which focused on these processes.

4. Content was encountered actively and purposefully, but was also supplemented by more abstract, less physical ways of learning. As in early childhood, these children seemed impelled by their own purposes (or by those they had taken on from the teacher). The teacher selected experiences which she predicted would fit these early, active ways of learning, and shaped space, materials, and time to make them possible. Children were observed to be deeply involved in projects of their own (scrapbooks, stories), and in those instigated by the teacher (their island projects).

While building on children's affinity for active, direct, sensory learning, the teacher also provided more abstract, less physical ways of learning content. Experiences themselves were verbal, as children listened to language while seated in one place, for sustained periods of time, or read by themselves. New ways of processing experience, using language to record, order, and classify ideas, were introduced by the teacher, as, for example, she helped them record their science experiments. Experiences were represented in writing as well as in art, construction, and play. Writing became diversified; children wrote stories, science observations, and "informational books", for example.

It was not as if concrete experiences were discontinued. On the contrary, it was inferred that these experiences helped scaffold new, more abstract, "school-like" learning. Children were observed to seek symbols or embodiments of these more abstract processes - moving to be near the book about which they

were writing or talking, sitting under the wall clock when working on a clock paper.

Tenor of discourse As there was simultaneous provision of familiar and new approaches to content, so also the tenor of discourse confirmed and accepted familiar, homelike ways of relating to others while developing new ways as needed in a wider, more complex situation than a home. The teacher was interested both in providing security and in encouraging independence. Five aspects of tenor will now be discussed.

1. The institutional cross-age organization was familial, and yet children were also part of the more formal, complex institution of the school. Security and support came from this organization. There were always older children as resources for younger, whose experience the teacher could draw on. Further, the teacher and each child had two years in this setting together. The classroom was, however, part of a school, and children were expected to conform to school-wide regulations and schedules.

2. The teacher's roles and beliefs were often like those of a parent; they were not, however, identical. Like a parent, she was in charge, and her authority unquestioned. She planned the curriculum, she had in mind a certain quality of life in the classroom, which, while not formulated in posted rules, was evident on the occasions when children had to be reminded of these standards. Her requirements were clear, if softened by her manner of inviting children's assent, as to Deborah, "You want to help?" (a function of her intonation as well as her words).

While the teacher was the source of authority, she was also like a supportive parent, in scaffolding children's relationships with the wider school, and their experiences with new ideas and processes. She was their "cafeteria

banker," and helped them prepare for school-wide events. Because she was in their midst, sharing experiences closely, she could help them in expressing their meanings.

The teacher's familiar, supportive relationship which helped children when learning something new, was communicated nonverbally, through physical closeness and the quality of her voice. While her actual words concerned new ideas, she intuitively altered these qualities of pitch, stress, and juncture to suit each interaction. Daniel told her about his chicken report, and she expressed surprise and delight with rising intonation, while leading him to a generalization with her words: "Do you mean there are different kinds of chickens?".

Thus, in this and other ways, like a parent, she made adjustments for individual differences, not simply of rate of development but in personality. Her provisions for groups and individuals and the flexibility in her requirements met these differences.

In spite of these parent-like roles and beliefs, there were ways in which the teacher was not parental. She never held and rarely hugged children. At times, she took on a formal register of language and behavior, for example, when leading rugtime. She had a strong belief in the importance of the development of independence, perhaps earlier than parents do (who of course share this goal). She expected children to make choices, to work out problems with each other, and accepted conflicts as normal.

3. A sense of community was both encouraged and extended by the teacher's long-range and immediate actions. She planned for many kinds of cooperative relationships, and provided shared experiences which then became part of children's common history.

Cooperative relationships were encouraged in several forms: meetings called by a teacher for special purposes (planning a backyard garden), working

with other children (on a farm project or newsletter article), working together in centers, or adding to group charts along with others. Children also organized spontaneously to carry out projects - to put on a play, to take a survey, to make things. They also helped each other, for example, reading to each other, and practicing hard spelling words on the board.

Shared experiences came about as a result of these small group, cooperative activities, with their overlapping memberships. Thus, social networks as well as networks of ideas were built over time, and experiences of small groups connected to and incorporated into the experiences of the whole class. Different small groups went to the class garden, and therefore when reporting, could say what was new without recapitulating the whole of the situation.

The teacher also encouraged a sense of community by her immediate actions. By what she said, she wove connections between ideas and people, past and present. She helped children remember: "What else did you get to pet [at the farm] ?" She joined children's names to their past experiences and ideas: "Polly and I thought it [the sprout] looked like a little pig's tail" or "Salli had a suggestion". In all of these instances, children's individual places were secured in a network of people, experiences, and ideas which extended back in time.

The teacher's other goal of extending children's sense of community was furthered by experiences in a larger, more diverse and complex community, through these same small groups and shared experiences. It was new to cooperate in non-familial groups. It was necessary to coordinate use of space, materials, and time with others. The provision of groups gave children the chance to work out conflicts and solve problems, thereby gaining experience in coping with and reconciling difficulties (Rosen & Rosen, 1973).

The establishment of common meaning through shared experience also had the effect of supporting children's representation of unshared experience. Common experiences (such as the farm trip) supported individual attempts to represent those unshared meanings of personal significance (such as George's donkey story, below).

Thus, to summarize this third point, the teacher's long-range planning and her immediate interaction encouraged a sense of community through provision of cooperative working situations and a common history. It also gave children experience in living within a wider, more complex and diverse community, and called for individual experience and its representation.

The last two generalizations about the tenor of interpersonal relationships concern children's views and actions. Within a tenor shaped by the teacher, what were children's attitudes toward authority (4), and what guided their behavior (5)?

4. Children accepted the teacher's underlying authority, while also having experience with the wider authority of the group and the school. Their participation in the teacher's social order demonstrates this acceptance. Many comments made during interviews conveyed this. "Everytime you study something like seeds, do you have to do a project each time?" was answered, "Well, when Mrs. Bridges tells us to."

While this taking-for-granted of a parent-like authority was fundamental, children in this room experienced new authority relationships to the school and to their peers. They had to learn how to speak and act with others in authority: teacher, principal, secretary. Peers, too, carried authority, as children were given responsibility for self-direction within small groups. While the teacher remained in the background, children could be heard to invoke unwritten rules: "The reading center is for reading, not for doing Chinese jump rope."

5. Children regulated their own activity; yet they had increased responsibility for their own behavior in relationship to the group. Making choices for oneself within limits was more characteristic of a family than of a more formal institution which required more uniform behavior. Latitude was given for these choices, and childlike approximations allowed.

Children chose what, which, and sometimes whether to do an activity. Even within required work, there were choices: which farm project, which books to read, which seeds to soak and plant. Many other activities were freely chosen, though inspired by the teacher, while others seemed to come from children themselves.

How to work was often though not always a choice. Weighing incubating eggs followed a specified procedure. However, when representing their experience, children could usually choose their materials and decide how to use them (although influenced by techniques learned earlier and materials the teacher made available). Just as their meanings were their own, so their own representations of these meanings were accepted, their art work and constructions, their invented spellings and language symbols.

Children chose when to do an activity. Especially during worktime, children could plan their own order of work, within a few constraints of weekly assignments, and in spite of their imagined need to "do math first". Thus, they could alternate kinds of work, and set their own pace.

Where to work was an assumed choice for children. Within tacit limits of appropriateness, they were free to use areas flexibly, doing math in the reading center, for example. With whom to work, including working alone, was also almost always a children's choice. While the teacher organized groups for certain experiences, and occasionally intervened to change a child's working

situation, in general, children were free to decide whether to work alone or with others.

While thus free to create their own environment, children had a new responsibility to adjust to the needs of others. Within a homelike environment, there were constraints, and children did have to consider others more than when in smaller, less formal neighborhood and family groups.

The sharing of space, materials, and time, the new responsibility for cooperation, independent problem-solving, and choice-making has been described above. Homelike events had their institutional side: children had to read, had to sit on the rug, rather than run or paint, for example, even within a flexible, homelike setting which offered many choices. Thus, it became gradually necessary to consider social, as well as individual needs.

Mode of discourse This final dimension of the context, its mode of discourse, is interpreted in this study to include nonverbal as well as verbal means of representation. Which were familiar, like children's early home experience with language and other modes? Which were characteristic of a more formal, explicit, and consciously controlled use of language? Four aspects will be thus compared.

1. The functions or purposes for children's expressions were familiar to them, while increasing in range and specialization. When children came to school, they could continue to use language for purposes it had served them in their early years. They used it within immediate, concrete situations, often in close conjunction with its referent, for example, looking at seeds while writing about them. Their texts were mixtures of poetic, expressive, and transactional elements (Britton, 1970), rather than unified in function. This contribution to a group chart illustrates: "My brine shrimp are playing follow the leder" - the expressive "my", the metaphor "follow the leader". In

general, their early writing functioned not only to communicate but to satisfy its creator, as children made things with words for "the delight of utterance" (Oakeschott in Britton, 1970).

New functions of language were also encouraged, as children wrote about the past (a remembered farm trip), the future (asking permission to go to the class garden), and the abstract (reports on space). They were also becoming able to produce writing in unified rather than mixed functions, appearing to have abstracted distinctive features of different genres or functions from models heard or read. They began to talk about reports and information books, and wrote with an intuitive grasp of this transactional mode: "Farmes are in all pears of the 50 stats like Ohio and Canada." Their observations excluded the observer: "the Catterpiller sheaded his skin twice." On the other hand, thought ramblings after a leaf walk were poetic: "The prcikly, trcikly, humpy, bumpy leaves ...".

Along with this development of specialized functions was a new emphasis on communication when a common background couldn't be assumed. There was a need to be explicit when writing newsletters and permission letters to parents (a distant, if familiar audience).

Finally, both spoken and written language were increasingly used to organize and extend experience, and thus to aid thought. Children seemed to do this spontaneously, as Mary did, when thinking about the size of humans and brine shrimp relative to their food: "his food is bigger then he is and we are bigger then are food is." The teacher, however, introduced children to a systematic use of language: to order ideas for newsletter articles, to compare and contrast features of related items, a chart of planets, for example. Thus they were learning to use language with increasing objectivity and detachment from the context to manipulate and control ideas.

2. Audiences for children's expression were familiar, although there were also new audiences. As in a family, there were audiences for children: friends, their teacher and their parents. Further, they were collaborative audiences, so that, as in early, preschool conversation, texts were jointly constructed by those who shared meanings. Children planned stories together, asking for help with wording ("How about 'He illustrates books'?"), working out spellings together, and reading each other what they had written. Collaborative charts invited children's contributions, which alone might have been fragmentary, but under the teacher's unifying heading, became a text. "Brine Shrimp Observations" was such a chart.

New kinds of audiences placed demands of children's language for communicative explicitness. These included familiar people who were far away or who hadn't shared experience, as well as less familiar or unknown audiences.

The internal audience of the self also became important as solo discourse was structured by inner dialogue instead of external collaboration, the writer taking the role of reader. Thought ramblings, stories, and representations were written alone, and the subject matter of newsletter articles was often divided between writers, who then wrote independently.

This new experience of writing with no external, collaborative audience was supported by provision of a collaborative audience before and after the writing - during planning and sharing, for example. Further support came from familiar aspects of field and tenor, writing alone but about a concrete present (field) which was shared by others (tenor).

3. The teacher was a special audience for children's work. Like a parent, she responded flexibly and supportively, often confirming security non-verbally through closeness or tone of voice. Like a parent, she was interested in their intentions, in the content of their talk and writing, and was mutually engaged

in whatever was being studied: flagpole shadows, butterflies, their choice of books. For example, rather than evaluate their contributions to a sharing of tree observations, she built on their ideas, relating them to the sense of the whole. After sharing her own, detailed observation of the inside of some berries, she created a context within which two children's collaborative comment "We thought we saw ... a spider web" made sense, by saying, "I know. It looks like there is something on the seed that looks like a little thread ... it just looks like a little spider web."

While the teacher focused on content first, form was also important to her, and sometimes became the content of their mutual attention (rather than the child's success or failure to manage it). The teacher misread Sean's wase as was, when, to her dismay, she realized he had intended weighs. (He had been weighing soil samples). Her non-judgmental response was to help him understand the spelling of weighs by relating it to other known words, after expressing this dismay.

The teacher was a familiar but special audience in other ways. She acted as scribe for some, taking down ideas as dictated texts. She valued their work, displayed it, and made it available for others to read. She accepted the childlike character of their work: its implicitness, its expressive elements, its spelling approximations.

The teacher was also a new kind of audience, especially to older, more mature children, as she encouraged attention to language itself. This new emphasis was marked by changes in her voice. With younger or less mature children, her voice was higher-pitched and more highly inflected, and her comments directed to content. With older or more mature children, her voice was lower, more serious or "matter-of-fact". First grader Evan, who said he couldn't think of any more ideas for his chick story was asked, "Did you see them

hatch? Did they hatch on Sunday? When we came in on Monday morning, were they hatched? ..." Second grade Polly, a secure writer, was helped to discover rules for the use of capital letters, as the teacher asked "Why did you make Permission a capital P? Is it a special word that needs to be capitalized?"

4. There were varied channels available for children's expression; among them, writing was increasingly expected and valued. It was homelike to provide varied channels for children's expression, broader than words alone. The art center was much used, and play occurred in many forms. Ideas from theme studies were assimilated and appeared in fleeting moments as well as over extended sessions. Talk was also valid as a mode of representation. Children could tell as well as read their observations, and their contributions "with their voices" to jointly written newsletter articles were acceptable. When writing was chosen or required, it had its familiar aspects, as children's personal meanings, choice of wordings, and management of conventions were allowed. In addition, there was little attempt to restrict children to certain forms or models. Betsy's favorite sentence from her China story, "It is I, the great mayor of the town. I've come because I want to visit your house" reflected her own internalization of this story register.

Writing was, however, increasingly expected, encouraged, and valued. Repeated required, taken-for-granted writing events ensured regular practice in varied kinds of composing and transcribing. Chosen projects involved or led to writing. Mary and Tika wrote "The Lamb and the Goat" story on their roller movie. After making a stuffed paper horse, Katie wrote about how she had made it. Children's own books were given a place of honor, and other children were observed to read them.

The teacher's shaping of the mode of discourse, in sum, allowed children to represent meaning in familiar ways, while introducing them to the

possibilities of written language in more specialized functions, about more distant subjects and for more remote audiences. She helped them cope with the demands of solo discourse and of formal conventions, by balancing these demands (of the new aspects of mode) with continued support from familiar aspects of field, tenor and mode of discourse.

Three Writing Events and Embedded Texts

Three writing events will be examined for the different demands they placed on the writer, and the different way in which these demands were scaffolded. That is, in each case, unfamiliar contextual aspects were supported in some way by familiar aspects.

Sean, like others, was asked to write a story about the imaginary island he was in the process of constructing. He wrote: "My name is Robin. I like to go to Animals' Island ..." Later, he composed an oral narrative in the presence of both the island and a friend. He said: "He hides in the cave most of the time and then he comes out here to get grass, water, and, um, he comes over to here ..."

The field of discourse was in part unfamiliar as he had had to invent the subject of his writing. The tenor and mode of the writing assignment were unfamiliar as, on this occasion, he was expected to write, and to write alone. However, familiar aspects in the field of discourse had been provided through many, redundant, and often concrete experiences over the previous three weeks with maps, shapes, and islands. The island under construction itself supplied familiar content for Sean's texts, and stood for ideas that were never expressed in either. Construction and talk in the presence of friends were familiar aspects of mode and tenor.

Thus, the unfamiliar aspects of the writing itself were balanced by familiar aspects before and after the writing. Sean's represented meanings

were not entirely caught by his written text, but were found both in his oral narrative and his construction.

In contrast, George's newsletter article about the donkey he saw at the farm, had no complementary support from a concrete representation or an oral narrative. It had to stand alone as a written communicative message to a distant if familiar audience about a past event. How were these unfamiliar aspects of field and mode supported?

A familiar field existed in this past context. Experiences at the farm, though over, were recent, vivid, and of personal significance. Recent class studies provided redundant experiences related to birth and growth, and prepared for the trip and for this writing. In addition, the tenor of discourse was familiar. Three boys collaborated on this farm article, dividing up the topics, assisting in spellings. Before this, the teacher had collaborated in helping children to remember their farm experience and to select and order content for their articles. Finally, the teacher heard George's part with great appreciation:

We Saw a donkey he had a Cross on his back becayse he Was the Cind fo donkey that Marry rod on When Whe Wus going to have her baby	(We saw a donkey. He had a cross on his back because he was the kind of donkey that Mary rode on when she was going to have her baby.)

George's text coming out of this experience, while coherent in itself, does not provide background a stranger would need to understand its circumstances. It therefore rests on implied meanings developed by shared and personal experiences over time.

This last example, an observation writing event, illustrates the most supportive, familial contextual condition for early writing. A small group and their teacher gathered around a terrarium, watching the toad and the chameleon being fed mealworms. As they observed, they talked and then gradually

began to write in their tablets. In this situation, the field of discourse was concretely, dynamically present, involving active, sensory exploration of a here and now, dynamic environment. The tenor was familiar, as children and teacher shared a common focus of interest, revealing their ideas and feelings conversationally and informally. The mode was also familiar, as oral language dominated, children conversing collaboratively, choosing their topic and what they would say about it. In their talk and in their writing, they could venture individual efforts which were their own, though supported by the larger, unstated text of understood meaning.

The unfamiliar aspect of this observing event was the fact that writing was eventually expected. Further, the phenomena being observed were complex, placing demands on children's powers to use language to describe these events. These new demands were scaffolded by this situation, particularly by what the teacher did within it to call to their attention significant features of animal behaviors: "Have you noticed how the frog and the chameleon differ in the way they eat it?", and by children's own language which they used to formulate and express these complex observations. Ted said of the chameleon: "He eats it with the side of his mouth and it hangs out," and of the toad, "He just gets about this much away from it, and sticks his tongue ... He just goes zoom." Out of many such comments made over 25 minutes, came the following text:

> the Toad gets about 1 inch Before he catches the meleaworm.
> The Chameleon eats with The Meleaworm on the side of his Mouth.

Ted's oral language needs to be added to this written text to give a fuller idea of the meaning of his experience. This written text, while it clearly depends on and arises from this context, does not fully represent contextual meaning. The problem of locating implied and represented meaning is discussed below in this final section.

The Location of Meaning

The following chart proposes a way of describing the location of children's several sources and evidances of meaning:

Represented Meaning	Implied Meaning					
Text: Approximation by child	Context: Clarity of shaping by teacher					
	Present writing event			Past shared history		
				Familiar		
Written	Field	Tenor	Mode	Field	Tenor	Mode
Oral				New		
Nonverbal	Field	Tenor	Mode	Field	Tenor	Mode

This chart summarizes the relationships described in this report. First, it contrasts children's represented meaning or text, with implied meaning, or context. It includes nonverbal as well as verbal representations of meaning, and talk as well as writing. It looks at the context as composed of field, tenor, and mode of discourse, existing in the past and present, and at each dimension of the context as characterized by familiar and new aspects. It offers a way of relating children's often implicit texts to contextual elements which, though unexpressed, complete their meaning and support their representation. Thus, clarity in the context, together with contextual scaffolding by modulation of familiar and new aspects, support these approximations, children's texts.

The following generalizations express these same relationships, and summarize theoretical propositions which, though derived from one particular classroom, could be tested in other settings for their descriptive usefulness:

1. Language is learned within a context of meanings. The nature of the meanings of the context affects the nature of language learned, its functions and its forms.

2. Each classroom context can be described in terms of the field, tenor, and mode of discourse, that is, in terms of the way in which children experience content (field), relate to others (tenor), and represent meaning (mode).

3. The shaping of the context will provide familiar as well as new aspects within the dimensions of field, tenor, and mode of discourse. Familiar aspects of one or more dimensions can support new aspects in others. New aspects of writing (mode) can be supported by familiar aspects of field, tenor, and mode.

4. Within each context, children will construct their own systems of language use. Evidence of this construction will be found in children's oral and written language which approximates a mature form and function, and only partially represents their meaning.

5. The teacher can bring about a wider range of language uses for a wider range of audiences by shaping a context, that is, creating situations which require these uses and audiences.

Conclusion

An early insight that what children cared about in this classroom was "doing things with friends" was borne out by subsequent observation. The teacher was seen to foster these interests by developing many systems of relationships linking people, ideas, and things over time.

This first insight led to the understanding that children and their teacher doing things (field) with friends (tenor) over days, months, and even

years were engaged in creating their own culture (Bruner, 1982), which they represented in varying verbal and nonverbal ways (mode). This understanding that children develop personal meaning though shared experience, and then create their culture jointly, is in marked contrast to a transmission view of education, which assumes children need only to receive and retain the content of culture from authorities, rather than to create or recreate it through active and interactive experience. Bruner's earlier model of learning by discovery thus has been extended and completed by a recognition of the importance of communal activity. The child makes knowledge his own, not only by representing it, but by sharing it with others.

Where does writing fit into this interpretation? Writing is only one of many ways of representing jointly-created cultural meaning. This teacher brought about writing by shaping contexts which developed meanings. These in turn led to varied written language uses. She supported the gradual development of a new mode of writing by embedding it in otherwise familiar events. In general, she maintained a focus on meaning. What the class did together in exploring their world through literature and through direct experience, gave support and significance to their early ventures in writing.

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